

Sufis Behaviour towards Non-Muslims

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Abstract:

Sufism is the inner, mystical, or psycho-spiritual dimension of Islam and can be described broadly as the intensification of Islamic faith and practice. The essence of Sufism is the Truth and its meaning is the actualization of the Truth. It tries to reach to the essence of the Truth by means of love and devotion. It is called the tariqat-the spiritual way towards God. Its followers are called sufis. The sufis not only stress on the practices of our holy Prophet (PBUH) but also emphasize on esoteric aspect of the religion. Sufism has played an important role in the spread of Islam. It tried equally to remove the differences among different sects of religions and people. The sufis followed the great values of Islam that is pluralism and religious harmony. Indeed, in the present time peace and interfaith harmony is the most needed thing to the world which can be found in the Sufis way. Sufism itself is a vast topic and detail study of its history and its different dimensions and doctrinal evolution lies beyond the scope of the present study. Here, an attempt has been made to explore the Sufis' behavior or attitude towards non-Muslims. In a nutshell, this paper relies upon both published primary and secondary sources as well as the researcher's knowledge acquired through discussion of the topic with many experts.

Key words: Sufism, Behavior, Truth, Love, exoteric, esoteric, ihsan, Muslims, Non-Muslims.

M. Fethullah Gulen says,

“The true practice of Islam or Sufism shows us that it is not faith, belief and religion which cause hatred, conflict and violence, but the sins of hatred and greed and other symptoms of the unrestrained ego, and it shows us how the true practice of religion, the purification of the heart, is the remedy for these.”

Sufism is a remarkable phenomenon which has rendered meritorious contributions in the eventual spread of Islam. They kept alive the commendable practices of the holy Prophet (PBUH) and laid equal emphasis on the esoteric aspect of the religion. Furthermore, the Sufis gave birth to a peaceful and progressive society by mending the differences between different sects. In this way they not only saved the Islamic world from endless strife rather curved out a peaceful world where everyone could worship according to his own way. Their amicable behavior and humanitarian outlook encouraged numerous people to enter the tenant of Islam. The greatest tool in their hand was the love to God and His creatures. Moreover, they practically employed the great values of Islam that is pluralism and religious harmony. Indeed, in the present time peace and interfaith harmony is the most needed thing to the world which can be found in the Sufis way. The most important thing in Sufism is that they perceive the world and the creature as a manifestation of Divine Beauty. To them every object of the universe presents the reality of Ultimate Reality. Thus, their peaceful propagation of religion through unbroken chains (*silsilahs*) deconstructed the erroneous notion held by some people that Islam was spread through the sword. Islam was perceived from its inception as a militant and its follower engaged in spreading their faith and law by armed might. (Lewis 1988, 71) Yet, the inspiring personalities of Sufis not helped in mending the dreadful differences rather their innovative methods and scholarly treatise generated a new spirit and interest in Islam. Today's world considerable tilt

towards the phenomenon of Sufis is the ultimate outcome of their doctrines and approaches to different things, including the non-Muslims subjects of state.

In Islam the two domains-outward and inward-remain more or less distinct, though they bear a very definite relationship to one another. This relationship can perhaps best be described by as follows; the outward-exorcism, (known in Islam as *sharia*). The inner truth or esoterism, that lies at the heart of religion (and is known in Islam as *haqiqa*) (Stoddart 2001, 15). According to a tradition of the Prophet (PBUH), Gabriel once asked the Prophet (PBUH) about *iman* or faith, then he asked about Islam and the last question was related to *ihsan*. The word literally means to lend beauty to an object; to beautify and to carry out a task in a beautiful way. Used as a technical term in the religious context it would mean true acceptance of God's command and worshipping Him with utter sincerity (Hamidullah 1993, 141). The phenomenon may be further explained through the holy Prophet (PBUH) saying, 'worship Allah as if He were present before you and watching every act of yours. Even if you do not see Him, He sees you' (Hamidullah 1993, 142). Mysticism is a universal phenomenon that runs through many great religious tradition of the world, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Manichaeism, Zoroastrianism, Hellenism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. In Islam this tradition is referred to as Sufism or *tasawwuf*. Originating from Quranic injunctions and prophet traditions (ahadith), including the sayings and deeds of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), Sufism as a distinct movement acquired contours at later stages (Anjum 2011, 34).

Sufism is the spirituality of Islam. Mysticism makes its appearance, as an inward dimension and to attempt to separate the mystical element from religion is like to do a violent act to spirituality. To sum up, *sharia*, for its part is the outward religion which is accessible to and indispensable for all. *Tasawwuf*, on the other hand, is only for those possessed for the

necessary vocation. In practice, therefore it cannot be the affair of minority though it may sometimes have popular manifestation (Stoddart 2001, 16). In short, it is the soul of Islam and the essence of faith. Its basic ingredients are a conscious and living realization of and belief in the Unity of God, adoration and love of God, purification of heart and righteousness. (Husain 1997, 7)

Varied conflicting opinions have been expressed regarding the origin of Sufism. Some suggest that the root of Sufism lay in the pre-Islamic religious traditions. (Anjum 2011, 41) Whereas, other believe that it begins with descent of Quran and the life and teaching of the holy Prophet (PBUH). The companions of the Prophet were devout men who performed acts of meditation and constant remembrance of the Divine through Its Names and through repetition of Quran. (Bakhtiar 1976, 6) Abu Hurayrah is on record as having stated that the Prophet (PBUH) commended a certain prayer to him and asked him to repeat it two thousand times every day before going to bed. He was an intelligent man. He took a string and put two thousands knots in it and then used it as a rosary. (Hamidullah 1993, 142) At the beginning of the eight century AD (2nd Islamic century), these ascetics came to be known as Sufis. The derivation of the word is not known for certain. It may come from the word meaning 'wool', referring to the rough woolen garments they wore; it may come from the word meaning 'purity'. Some say that the word stems from 'line' referring the people who prayed in a line directly behind the Prophet (PBUH). Still other among the Sufis themselves say that the word is too sublime to be derived from anything. (Bakhtiar 1976, 6)

Sufis is a vast topic and a detailed history of its different aspects and doctrinal evolution lies beyond the scope of the present study. Therefore, we should confine ourselves to the specific area that is the Sufis behavior or attitude towards non-Muslims. While studying the phenomenon of Sufism one often

finds the three 'ways' (action, love and knowledge), deeply entrenched in the Sufi doctrines. (Nasr 2000, 245) Any and all mystical traditions chimed with the desire for peace and love generation for a gentler, more forgiving and indulgent outlook on life, a more esoteric, yet simpler vision of existence. (Sardar 2004, 57) Thus, love to Creator and His creature is the dominant element of Sufis ways. Since, Sufism is revolving within the sphere of the fundamentals of Islam which is a religion of peace and harmony; therefore the Sufis strive hard to ensure utmost tolerance and pluralism within the society. Moreover, the Sufis are often known for their humanitarian outlook and harmless gestures. Not only the Sufism but all the mystic movements are quite popular for its peaceful nature.

An essential Sufi value that of tolerance in social behavior and universalism in approach. The Sufis have an inclusive approach towards people belonging to different sects, juristic schools, ethnic groups and religions. They displayed more tolerance towards the non-Muslims, as compared to the upholders of exoteric Islam. In fact, Sufism served as a junction for mystically-inclined adherents of different religious traditions. In the heterogeneous society during the vast Muslim Empire under the Umayyads and Abbasids, the Sufis held discourses with the Christian priests, Jewish rabbis, and Buddhist and Zoroastrian sages. (Anjum 2011, 67) Moreover Muslim society was also beset by sectarian cleavages, and there existed friction among the adherents of various religions. The Sufis helped in mending the differences as the Sufis were beyond sectarian affiliation. In addition, many of the Sufis taught *fiqh* in various *madrasahs* (centers of learning), they did not make these juristic differences into a bone of contention. (Anjum 2011, 67-68)

As a matter of fact, the Sufis took inspiration from the personality and deeds of the holy Prophet (PBUH), (Shah 1933, 15) therefore citing some of his traditions (ahadith) would be pertinent and helpful in explaining the Sufis attitude towards

non-Muslims. After it his personal life and behavior towards non-Muslim subjects would be reckoned. The holy Prophet (PBUH) clearly stipulates in the words, “The Merciful takes mercy on those who treat the people mercifully. Treat those on earth mercifully so that the Lord in heaven takes mercy on you” (Zaman 1986, 329). He further says, ‘Those who killed a non-Muslim citizen of the state will not even smell the fragrance of the heaven’. When he was on the death-bed he strongly exhorted his successors in the words, ‘observe scrupulously the protection awarded by me to the non-Muslims subjects’. When the Prophet (PBUH) migrated to Madinah, there was ruler, rules and consequently no responsibility for the crimes committed. He established the state of Madinah and drafted the first written constitution in which the Muslims and Jews were considered one nation. It is worth mentioning that the Muslims were only fifteen percent of the population, yet the Jews raised the Prophet as the head of Madinah probably for his golden principles of justice, tolerance, freedom of religion and peaceful coexistence (Ahmad 2011). One of the clause of the constitution stated, ‘for Muslims their religion and for Jews their religion’ (Hamidullah 1993, 159). The holy Prophet was so conscious of the rights and uplift of the non-Muslim subject because of the fact that the Book which God bestowed on him thoroughly guided him. The Quran says, ‘...they may belong to any faith, and entertain and cherish any belief, however wrong and un-Islamic they may be, Islam does not disturb them. Their life and property are *haram* (forbidden) in its sight and the sword of Islam is impotent against them’ Maududi 1978, 122).

After the demise of the holy Prophet (PBUH) the responsibility fell on the shoulders of the companions to spread the light of Islam to every corner. They not only disseminated the new religion but strictly observed the glorious principles of tolerance and pluralism which impressed the non-Muslims and won their hearts and mind. Interestingly, during the golden age of Umer, the second caliph, the non-Muslim themselves invited

the Muslims to rule over them. The chain of command of propagating Islam continued and different segment participated in the process in one way or the other. They, the Sufis who are considered the heirs of the holy Prophet (PBUH) rendered meritorious services in the transmission of the light of Islam. Sticking firmly to the fundamentals of Islam, taking inspiration from Quran and ahadith (sayings) of the Prophet (PBUH), they kept or revived the most golden principles of Islam that is pluralism, peace, tolerance, etc. which had been underestimated by the exotericists.

The enigma of the rapid spread and expansion of Islam and its adamant stability lies in the fact that it has given a religious form to what constitute the essence of all religions. It is in this sense that some Sufis have said that, being the terminal religion, Islam is the synthesis of preceding religions (Laude 2011, 3). It is worth mentioning that one of the founder of Sufism, Ibn al-'Arabi often referred to these Quranic verses. (Laude 2011, 78) For each We have established a law and a path. Had God willed, He could have made you one community. But that He might try you by that which he had given you [He had made you as you are]. So vie with one another in good works. Unto God ye will all return, and he will inform you of that wherein you differed. (5:48) Say: we believe in God, and that which was revealed unto Abraham, and Ishmael, and Isaac, and Jacob, and the tribes and that which was given unto Moses and Jesus, and the prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction between them, and unto Him we have submitted. (2:136) And do not hold discourse with the people of Book except that which is finest, save those who do wrong. And say: believe in that which hath been revealed to us and to you. Our Lord and Your Lord is one, and unto Him we call unto the way of thy Lord with wisdom and fair exhortation, and hold discourse with them [the people of the Book] in the finest manner, (16:125). It is on the bases of these verses that the Martin Lings asserted that the universality proper to all true

religions can be found within each religion's mystical dimension or esoteric essence, one of the distinctive features of Islam is the fact that universality is indelibly inscribed within its founding revelation- as well as within its esoteric essence. "All mysticisms are equally universal.... in that they all lead to one truth. But one feature of Islam, and therefore of Sufism, is what might be called a secondary universality (Lings 1975, 22-23). The message of Quran is not only unique in the sense that it recognizes the other religions rather it also holds them with great reverence. In this way Quran encourages utmost pluralism and tolerance among the followers of different religions.

According to concept of cycles of time that Islam received from revelation, each prophet message draws upon the spiritual heritage of humanity. Islam is particularly aware of this inheritance since it presents itself the final expression of the divine will, which has been revealed to the mankind since Adam, thus as a confirmation and the completion of revelation that preceded it. Because of this it recognizes and takes up the messages of the prophets who came before Muhammad (PBUH) (Geoffroy and Gaetani 2010, 182). Quran is an explicit on this legacy as the above mentioned verse (2:136) stipulates. Muhammad is the "seal"- meaning the last of the prophets- of which the number is 124,000, according to him. The Quran specify it by reading, "for every community there is a Messenger", (10:47). (Geoffroy and Gaetani 2010, 182) Therefore, Islam considers the diversity of people and religion as an expression of divine beauty. The Sufi poet and pioneer Maulana Jalal-ud-Din Rumi indicates that God is different from all beings and that absolutely nothing can be compared unto Him and all beings derive their total reality from God and therefore, in their essential nature they have no reality outside of His Reality. "There is no real but the Real". Since God is the only real being. He is absolutely other than all created existence, which if considered only in itself, is unreal. In the

face of His absolute reality, all creatures are nothing. On the other hand, any reality that a creature does possess must ultimately belong to God. In other words the entire creature derives from that reality which in absolute sense belongs to God alone (Chittick and Nasr 2010, 27-28). As Ibn Arabi often points out in his *Fusus al-hikam*, the Quran summarizes these two point of views in the verse, “Nothing is like Him; and He is the Hearing, the Seeing” (XL, 9). In a nutshell it is summed up, God is different from all created existence, but creation is not other than God in its essential nature (Chittick and Nasr 2010, 27-28). Maulan Rumi further says, although the universe is one when seen from the point of view of Divine Essence, from the point of view of relativity there is a fundamental polarization into microcosm and macrocosm. The macrocosm is the universe in all its indefinite multiplicity, reflecting the Divine Names and Qualities as so many individual particularizations and determined modes. The microcosm is the man who reflects these some qualities but as a totality. The macrocosm and the microcosm are like two mirrors facing each other; each contains all of the others qualities, but the one is more outward and objective manner or in detail (*mufassul*) and the other in more inward and subjective manner and in summary form (*mujmal*). In short words, all the Divine Qualities are contained and integrated in man in such a way that they are neither confused nor separated (Chittick and Nasr 2010, 49-50). Rumi believes that Universal Man is the principle of all manifestation and thus the prototype of microcosm and macrocosm. The term “Universal Man” was given prominence by Ibn Arabi, and from the point of view of Sufism the Prophet of Islam is the most perfect manifestation of Universal Man (Chittick and Nasr 2010, 49-50). The essence of the above mentioned philosophy is that divergence in the universe and variation in human being is nothing else for Sufis but the wisdom and beauty of God. To them everything in the world reflects the ultimate reality and truth of Allah.

Thus there exists a theology of religious pluralism, even in its exoteric aspects. Quran says, “To each of you, We have given a path and perspective”, (5:48) (Geoffroy and Gaetani 2010, 183). The universalism and pluralism of Islam is evidently reflected in the statements of the holy Prophet (PBUH), “we prophets are all sons of the same family, our religion is but one”, “whoever does evil to a Christian or a Jew will be my enemy on the Day of Judgment”. There are undoubtedly Sufis who are open to a broad to a broad interpretation of the Quranic theme of the “immutable religion”. They sense more keenly than others this community of worship that is composed of all humanity beyond the diversity of belief. Their openness to other faiths arises from an obvious metaphysical fact: “There can be only doctrine of the divine oneness” (Geoffroy and Gaetani 2010, 183).

In the Quran, even the Voice of God advises the Muslims, “if you are in doubt what We have sent down to you, ask those who were reading the scripture before you”, (10:94) (Griffith 2010, 6). It is worth mentioning that the Christians and Jews were addressed in Quran as the people of Book. In an Islamic state they were given complete protection and freedom of following their own religion. Therefore, Sufism is viewed a potential ally of Christian West and other religions, an Islamic movement and a view of man with which a working relationship can be achieved. In short to use the phrase of Mark Tully, it is ‘something understood’. Hence, Sufism colours many cultural and artistic endeavors. An English composer John Tavener openly confessed the gigantic influence and immense inspiration he took from the writings of the well-known Sufi writer Frithjof Schuon (Norris 2006, 10). Furthermore, Balkan boarder regions are frequently known for their haven of small *dervish* communities and villagers whose way of life is centered upon these communities. The frontier region between Greece and Macedonia is one such region. Here too, these *dervish* communities are found who are known for their flexible

religious views and they are frequented by followers of both faiths and by believers in neither. Epirus marks the border between Greece and Albania is another such region. The Greece burnt the villages to the ground by the reason that the people were suspected of harboring not only bands but fugitives from justice and have shared their plunders. To this the reply of the Bektashis was that, since they were the natural allies of Albanians and that hospitality, irrespective of persons, was the rule of Sufi order (Norris 2006, 79). The Bektashis were the followers of Sufi doctrine, therefore, they are peaceful and humanitarian in approach.

Forgiveness and reconciliation are the main features of the Sufi approach to world politics. Sufism works for tolerance, inclusiveness, sisterhood, brotherhood, and to this end it seeks social healing and eschews revenge. Sufi confidence concerning divine justice in no way precludes effort to right wrongs, but it does entail an understanding that those who sow bitter fruit will ultimately taste it. The most constructive way for the Sufi to contribute to the manifestation of a better world is to seek transformation.

It comes from acknowledging and accepting basic differences in world-view among different peoples. Acknowledgment of differences is appreciation, honoring the unique experience of each individual, citizen, believer, and civilization. This appreciation gains its wholeness through empathy. Once we are able through education constantly to shift subject and object, agent and structure in our dialogic analysis, we begin to experience the history of the other as our own, without judgment and without hate.

The above discussion shows that in Islam there is complete inter-religious harmony and utmost freedom to the followers of other religion. Islam is universal religion and encourages cultural and religious diversity. Since, Sufis are working within the fold of Islam, therefore, they strictly hold these commandments. Nevertheless, as compared to the

exotericists Sufis; the esotericists, are greater proponents of the peace and tranquility. It is an open secret that today, the call of the Sufis is more appealing to the world in relation to the message of the exoteric. Yet, both aspects of the religion are equally important, however Sufi aspect of religion has attracted greater number of people and non-Muslims due to its inclusive approach. It has always granted complete freedom of religion and expression. Thus, a prosperous and viable multi-cultural society came out as result of the Sufi benign and magnanimous attitude towards the followers of religion other than Islam. Another greater contribution of the Sufis *silsilahs* was that its adherents and graduates spread almost all over the world that in turn developed a sort of fraternity among the people belonging to different races, cultures and backgrounds.

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